

crown's position. The vast sums said to have found their way to Rome as Annates were a mere trickle. But the breach was followed by an action which could have tipped the balance of domestic power decisively in favour of the monarchy. The dissolution of the monasteries and the expropriation of monastic lands have been called a revolution in landownership comparable only to that effected by the Norman Conquest.

Action against some of the smaller houses had preceded the breach with Rome. Wolsey had closed twenty-nine small communities between 1524 and 1529, using the proceeds to support his new foundations. After the compilation of the *Valor ecclesiasticus* in 1535/6 another 200 smaller monasteries were dissolved by statute, and the remaining greater houses followed in 1538–40. Large sums of money poured into the royal coffers and for a few years the ordinary crown revenues were more than doubled. But by the end of the reign more than half of the properties had been sold off, the proceeds swallowed up by the abortive war against France. The monastic estates found their way, in the end, less to new men than to ambitious families already well established in county society.

The driving force against Rome and the monasteries was Cromwell, whose supervision gave a coherence and purpose to the years 1530–40, singularly lacking in the rest of Henry's reign. For years, Cromwell seemed to be the great survivor, too useful to be cast aside. In his rise, he had dexterously side-stepped the fall of his patron, and promoted the king's wishes in the divorce and the marriage to Anne Boleyn. The death of Catherine in January 1536 and the miscarriage which followed two weeks later spelled Anne's death-warrant, since the king was now free to make a new and undisputed marriage, and his eye had already lighted upon Jane Seymour. Cromwell presided over the charges of adultery and Anne, her brother, and four others met their death. Later the same year, the Pilgrimage of Grace called for Cromwell's dismissal and 'condign punishment': the rebels were put down and Cromwell escaped. In 1539 his position appeared to be badly shaken when the Act of Six Articles signified the return to a more conservative doctrinal stance, away from the Reformation views favoured by Cromwell. He recovered once more, and in the autumn of 1539 was busily arranging Henry's fourth marriage to Anne of Cleves, after Jane Seymour's death in childbirth. The tragicomedy of that celebrated non-event finally proved Cromwell's downfall. Elevated to the earldom of Essex in April 1540, he was peremptorily arrested less than two months later, and executed within six weeks. The charges against him were grotesque. One does not know whether to marvel more at Henry's ingratitude or his stupidity.

Henry never found another servant remotely approaching Cromwell's capacity. The greatest influence belonged to the elderly duke of Norfolk, uncle to the king's fifth wife Catherine Howard, until he in turn fell foul of the king in the dying months of the reign. The main event of these years was a return to Henry's